

Conservation House  
18-32 Manners Street  
Wellington 6011  
doc.govt.nz

22 April 2026

Ref: OIAD-6209

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 24 March 2026, in which you asked for information regarding wildlife trafficking.

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA).

### Context

DOC has a dedicated Wildlife Crime Team (the Team) which focus on offending involving wildlife species protected by the Wildlife Act 1953 and/or the Trade in Endangered Species Act 1989 (the Acts). This team also conducts investigations for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) team, and supports DOC warranted officers with compliance.

The Team's work covers a broad range of wildlife-related incidents and investigations, many of which run for months or years. Cooperation and collaboration with domestic agencies (NZ Police, NZ Customs, and Ministry for Primary Industries) and overseas partner agencies (like INTERPOL and Europol) are integral to combatting wildlife crime and trafficking.

DOC allocates its resources to support the full enforcement response to wildlife trafficking with detection, investigation, and prosecution sitting alongside prevention as equal priorities. DOC actively pursues offenders under the Acts where sufficient evidence exists. A prime example of this is the recent 2025 prosecution of a smuggler who was sentenced for purchasing and intending to export native geckos: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2025-media-releases/smuggler-caught-green-handed-with-rare-native-gecko/>.

When offending extends beyond New Zealand's borders or individuals cannot be intercepted domestically, DOC works closely with overseas and partner agencies to investigate trans-national offending and recover illegally trafficked wildlife. This is demonstrated by the 2026 repatriation of native geckos following an international investigation: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2026-media-releases/gecko-repatriation-closes-curious-trans-national-case/>.

## Your questions and DOC responses

1. *How many times were DOC alerted to a foreign national with convictions related to wildlife trafficking entering New Zealand in each year, from 2020 to 2025 - and in 2026 to date?*
2. *How many times were DOC alerted to a foreign national with suspected ties to wildlife trafficking entering New Zealand in each year, from 2020 to 2025 - and in 2026 to date?*

One method used to combat wildlife trafficking is the identification and monitoring of persons of interest, either with prior convictions for or suspected ties to wildlife trafficking, visiting New Zealand. This is a proactive approach to ensure the appropriate response is in place. To achieve this, DOC supplies border staff with a curated list of names and are alerted on an ad-hoc basis by NZ Customs when individuals matching these profiles board flights to New Zealand. Notification can therefore occur at all hours of the day. Given the alert list is carefully refined, and persons of interest may not travel to New Zealand, the number of alerts received are relatively low.

DOC does not keep a formal record of when alerts are received from NZ Customs and is not obligated, nor has the mechanisms in place, to do so. We would therefore have to manually search through a large number of records to provide you with the information you seek, which would likely have an unreasonable impact on our ability to carry out our core functions. Your request is therefore refused under section 18(f) of the OIA as the information cannot be made available without substantial collation and research.

To try and provide you with some information, we have managed to identify two alerts received since the start of 2025.

3. *What information does DOC hold on which regions of New Zealand these individuals travelled to in their time here?*

When DOC is alerted of persons of interest, partner agencies at the border provide copies of submitted itineraries to the Team. Although individuals can provide itineraries on entry, it is not a requirement they follow these plans. However, through careful monitoring, DOC can track the general areas visited by suspected wildlife traffickers. As with other visitors, they can and do travel to most parts of the country.

4. *How many times did DOC staff issue warnings to local NZ-based conservation trusts, wildlife sanctuaries, or organisations in relation to these incidents, in each year from 2020 to 2025, and in 2026 to date?*

DOC does not routinely issue formal “warnings” or communications to local New Zealand-based conservation trusts, wildlife sanctuaries, or organisations in relation to suspected wildlife traffickers. Warnings or alerts are used sparingly and generally only where an event is assessed as imminent, there is a need to increase vigilance, the individual or vehicle of concern cannot be located directly, and no compliance-trained staff are available to attend or intervene in a timely manner.

Alerts or warnings, whether issued internally or externally, are not DOC's primary or preferred mechanism for managing wildlife trafficking risk. In many circumstances, such alerts carry limited operational or preventative value, particularly where they may inadvertently alert persons of interest or compromise investigative activity. As a result, DOC generally relies on other investigative and risk-management tools that are assessed as more effective and proportionate, including targeted compliance and surveillance activity, internal tasking and briefings of relevant staff, border and mail or post pathway alerts, and information-sharing with partner agencies to assess risk, intent, and associated networks.

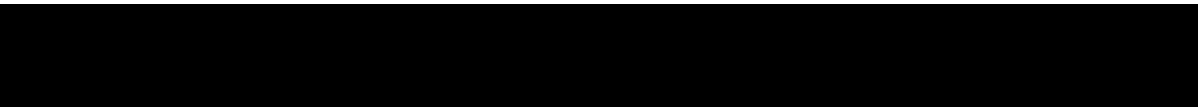
DOC does not hold a centrally collated record of warnings or alerts issued to its own staff or external organisations – and is not legally required to. Alerts are used as an investigative tool and may be recorded within individual incident files where relevant. However, DOC staff may share an alert or warning at a local level with a relevant stakeholder on an ad-hoc basis, which may not be recorded.

Based on a search of relevant incident records for the period 2020 to 2026 year to date, DOC has not identified any recorded instances of DOC staff issuing warnings to local New Zealand-based conservation trusts, wildlife sanctuaries, or organisations in relation to the incidents referenced in your request. Your request is therefore refused under section 18(e) of the OIA – the information requested does not exist or cannot be found.

DOC has identified one internal alert issued in 2022 relating to a person of interest, and one internal alert issued in 2025 relating to a vehicle of interest. These alerts were issued for investigative and risk-management purposes only and were not warnings provided to external organisations.

You are entitled to seek an investigation and review of my decision by writing to an Ombudsman as provided by section 28(3) of the OIA.

Please note this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on DOC's website.



Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Anita Murrell'.

Anita Murrell  
Principal Advisor Regulatory Authorisations  
Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*